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FEATURED

## From club to streets to ballot

Wiley ‘Chip’ Price IV runs for state rep with endorsement of rep leaving the seat

By Chris King 2 hrs ago



Wiley “Chip” Price IV campaigned for state representative in the 84<sup>th</sup> District last month. The Democratic primary is Tuesday, August 7.

Photo by Wiley Price / St. Louis American

Wiley Price IV – his family and friends call him “Chip” – decided to run for state representative because of two monumental life changes.

First, he became a father, and he realized he needed to do something to improve the fortunes of his daughter, especially in terms of education. And, then, Michael Brown was killed by a Ferguson Police officer in August 2014, and Price spent more than a month solid in the streets.

Ferguson woke up Price, 34, from the life of a young millennial clubber, rapper and promoter. “That felt like a revolution,” he said.



But it was the next wave of protests, following former St. Louis Police Officer Jason Stockley being exonerated in September 2017 of first-degree murder for the killing of a black motorist, that got Price off the streets and onto the ballot.

“The Stockley verdict protests did not seem like revolution,” Price said. “It did not feel like activism.”

The demands of protest organizers, he judged, were either unattainable or unenforceable. Then he saw voters approve measures that imposed tax increases to boost the pay of police officers (and firefighters), and he began to reconsider the value of protest as a means to bring change on the issues that matter to him.

“I began to ask, ‘What are we really out here for?’” Price said. “I began to look for another change agency. I began to look into legislation.”

He signed up for a workshop led by Jeff Smith, former state senator, on the logistics of running for office. Smith, who knew Price's father, *St. Louis American* photojournalist Wiley Price, saw potential and encouraged him to run.

Price learned that his representative in the Missouri House of Representatives, state Rep. Karla May (D-St. Louis), was term-limited in District 84, which covers Kingshighway Boulevard to the St. Louis County line. When he visited her at work in Jefferson City, May was impressed and offered her endorsement of his candidacy.

“He looked good,” May said. “I introduced him to a lot of my colleagues, Democrats and Republicans, and all of the lobbyists. It was a good day, with a lot going on. He did fabulous. He is an intelligent, articulate young man. A lot of people came back to me, later, and said, ‘I like him. Who is he?’”

Price decided to run for the seat as a son of the local streets.

“I have worked, lived and played in every corner of the 84<sup>th</sup> District,” he said. “I am from the West Side of St. Louis. I have learned to maneuver in very nuanced situations.”

When filing for the August 7 primary closed, Price found himself with only one opponent, a white attorney who grew up in Kansas named Brad Bakker. (“He left out one ‘k’ in his last name,” Price joked, but it was only a joke; Bakker has a progressive platform that starts with cash bail reform, a signature demand of Ferguson protestors.)

Bakker is far outraising Price and, as an attorney, knows the law in far-greater detail than this rapper turned-protestor, turned-candidate, but Price knows many things – and people – far beyond his opponent’s grasp.

May, whose seat they are competing for, thinks that gives Price the edge.

“You don’t have to be a lawyer to do this job,” May said. “Lawyers like to argue both sides. We try to do things in a compromising way. And we have legislative researchers who know the law; you just tell them what it is you want to change, and they formulate the bill based on the existing law.”

Price, if elected, will have at his disposal the resources that Bakker would bring to the table. And he also has experiences that money won’t buy and law school can’t teach.

“A representative needs to be someone within the community who is part of the community,” May said. “You have to be real clear and understand how a law will impact the community. You have to know it because you lived it. Wiley knows it because he lived it.”

The comparison to another rapper turned-protestor, turned-legislator occurred to her: state Rep. Bruce Franks Jr. (D-St. Louis) of District 78.

“Another person like Wiley is Bruce Franks,” May said. “He will listen to a lot of legislative jargon and then say, ‘Wait a minute. This is not right. This will not work for my community.’ Wiley also will bring that to the table. He will bring a common sense part of government that we need.”

